

## Eugenics and Social Security

SIR,—The recent debate on the Beveridge Report (EUGENICS REVIEW, April 1944, p. 17) shows the need for further consideration of the eugenic aspects concerned. Though Sir William (Report paragraph 411) says large families are one of the two main causes of want, he wishes (paragraph 417) to encourage them. He says (paragraph 413) the British race with its present rate of reproduction cannot continue, means of reversing this trend must be found, and children's allowances can help to restore the birth-rate. These views are highly disputable. Many persons believe that Britain is overcrowded, and a smaller population would be better off economically and eugenically. Since 1914 the population has increased by several millions, many foreign investments have been consumed, and much foreign trade lost. Unemployment between the wars rose to great heights. These tendencies seem likely to increase after this war, as soon as scarcity of goods has been met. Economic nationalism abroad is likely to increase. The end of the Napoleonic wars left Britain poor for decades. It would seem wise to be prepared for many lean years.

The common opinion is that the Beveridge system of children's allowances will not increase the general birth-rate and population, but will affect the differential birth-rate, and in a dysgenic way, a point nowhere considered in the Report. It seems probable that an allowance of five or even eight shillings per child will not induce the efficient classes to have more children. On the other hand, the total cost, £110 millions a year, will fall mostly upon these classes. The less efficient classes, including the poorest ones and the mental defectives, produce now more children than they can adequately support. What people fear is that indiscriminate children's allowances will result in these classes having still larger families. If history is any guide this seems probable. The Speenhamland Poor Law system, begun in 1795, whereby 1s. 6d. per week was given for each child, made children a paying concern, and produced great over-population in rural England, converting the peasants from a sturdy race of hardworking farmers to "a landless proletariat living partly on doles, from whom had been taken away every incentive to good work, thrift, or temperate living" (*An Economic History of England*, Waters). In his Galton Lecture (EUGENICS REVIEW, January 1943, p. 117), Sir William Beveridge said the Speenhamland experiment had not operated long enough to increase the number of children born. His statement is contrary to the recorded facts. The stimulus to births operated strongly, and the system lasted thirty-nine years.

Recent experience has been similar. The Annual Report of the Charity Organization Society for 1937-8, pp. 7-10, said the Unemployed Assistance Board system of indiscriminate dole to the unem-

ployed, along with family allowances in proportion to the number of children, was producing a vast, increasing, and demoralized population, many not wanting to work and producing more and more children like themselves.

Further light is afforded by Dr. Stopes in her book, *Roman Catholic Methods of Birth Control*. She quotes the Rev. D. Cameron as saying that in Scotland the Irish priesthood urge on their people the duty of large families. The Scots will thus be dispossessed by economic pressure, having to support by taxes and charities the offspring of these intemperate, thriftless, and often criminal parents. She cites a pamphlet of the Catholic Truth Society, in which a woman doctor hopes birth control will cause non-Catholics to die out, the Catholic race prevail, and England again become a Catholic country. There seems little doubt but that the poorer Irish in large cities like Glasgow and Liverpool will be induced by automatic children's allowances to increase their families. It cannot be believed that many parents among them, oppressed by poverty, are not trying to restrict their families now.

Those who argue that the poorest classes are already breeding to the maximum capacity—a statement which seems incredible—so children's allowances will not increase their birth-rate, overlook the fact that the allowances, even if they do not increase the birth-rate, will inevitably increase the survival rate of such children; so the numbers of the poorest and the mentally defective classes, the financial burden on the efficient classes, and the tendency of the latter to have even fewer children, will all increase.

Mr. Rowntree's recent book, *Poverty and Progress*, analysing conditions in York, divides the working class into three wage groups and gives the birth- and death-rates for 1935-6 as follows:

		<i>Births</i>	<i>Deaths</i>	<i>Excess</i>
Best paid	...	8.6	8.4	0.2
Middle	...	14.6	11.2	3.4
Poorest	...	28.6	13.5	15.1

The highest paid are not increasing at all, the second highest are hardly increasing, the poorest are increasing at the tremendous rate of 15.1 per 1,000, which would multiply their numbers 4½ times in a century.

In 1899 a similar inquiry by Mr. Rowntree gave very different results, viz.:

		<i>Births</i>	<i>Deaths</i>	<i>Excess</i>
Best paid	...	29	13.4	15.6
Middle	...	40.3	20.7	19.6
Poorest	...	39.8	27.7	12.1

Thus in 1899 the highest paid workers were multiplying faster than the lowest, even though the lowest had a far higher birth-rate. This revolution has come about because in 1899 each class of workers had to support their own children. This the poorest could not do owing to the enormous birth-rate, which, of course, produced a very high

death-rate. To-day the breeding and feeding of children are largely done by two entirely different classes. One class, the most inefficient, begets the children, and these are supported by the efficient class. So argues the Editor of *New Generation* in the April and May 1943 numbers. He quotes Mrs. Burns' statement regarding her recent inquiry in the County of Durham, that "Quite a few women who are actually certified mentally defective are married and have had large families." Moreover, he adds, the children of two-thirds of mentally defective mothers are illegitimate (*Sterilization*, Hinton and Calcutt).

There is nothing to indicate that Sir William Beveridge has considered these eugenic and demographic aspects, and whether indiscriminate children's allowances will not, in the absence of contraception and sterilization, aggravate the gravely deteriorated differential birth-rate.

The Report no doubt has valuable proposals for simplifying and amalgamating the many branches of social security, but it has the defect of being a one-man report. The Interdepartmental Committee members were only advisers and assessors, and the public is in the dark how far each or any of them agreed or disagreed with the proposals. The members, except the Chairman, were all civil servants. A national scheme of such magnitude is generally based on a careful inquiry by a Royal Commission of expert non-officials and officials, but no non-officials, including eugenists, demographers, and economists other than the Chairman, were members of the Committees.

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*To the Editor, Eugenics Review*

SIR,—I agree with your correspondent Mr. Wicksteed Armstrong that children's allowances should not be given without any regard as to how the money is spent. Sir William Beveridge is not alone among legislators and planners in paying no attention to the social problem group. If we do have children's allowances we ought at the same time to make provision for ensuring that they are rightly administered and thus checking cruelty to children. The N.S.P.C.C. does its best, but the laws are quite inadequate to deal with the matter. If children's welfare officers were appointed to co-operate with the schools and health visitors and to visit all unsatisfactory cases reported to them; and if the laws were altered enabling them to take action and remove children from certain wholly undesirable parents, this should be a safeguard for the proper administration of children's allowances.

At present we have cases where a mother having got tired of her children deserts them and has more children by another man, her first family having to be adopted by the Guardians. As a Guardian and welfare worker of many years' experience, I deplore the fact that the law as it stands is unable to prevent "cruelty to children" except in the grossest and most brutal form. It is quite wrong to leave this duty to a voluntary society. What is or ought to be everybody's responsibility should be undertaken by the State. This would be a good opportunity to press for the reform.

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